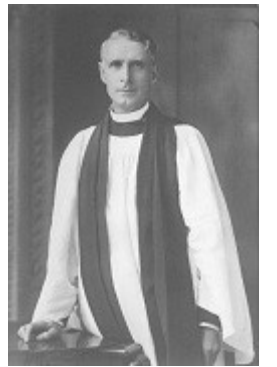


H. A. Cody: Parson and Poet

One of New Brunswick's most celebrated writers was born in Queens County 100 years ago this week

By
TED JONES



(Ted Jones, a teacher at Fredericton High School, is currently working on a full-length biography of H. A. Cody)

Along the shore of Washademoak Lake, Queens County, New Brunswick, there is a tiny village simply called Codys, which bears the family name of one of Canada's first popular novelists, Hiram Alfred Cody, who was born there on July 3rd, 1872. A century has now passed and the house of his birth, "Hillscote," still stands, high above the brown fields that slope toward the lake. In recent years it has been restored, much of the original style being recaptured.

Between 1908 and 1937 twenty-five books appeared under the signature of H. A. Cody. Twenty-one of them were novels, two were biographies, one was a collection of poems. Along with Ralph Connor, Gilbert Parker, L. M. Montgomery, and Stephen Leacock, his name was also on the best seller lists. In bookshops today collectors browse for Cody books, long since out of print. The list, however, is still very impressive:

- An Apostle of the North (1908)
- The Frontiersman (1910)
- On Trail and Rapid by Dog-Sled and Canoe (1910)
- The Fourth Watch (1911)
- The Long Patrol (1912)
- The Chief of the Ranges (1913)
- If Any Man Sin (1915)
- Rod of the Lone Patrol (1916)
- Under Sealed Orders (1917)
- The Unknown Wrestler (1918)
- The Touch of Abner (1919)
- Glen of the High North (1920)
- Jess of the Rebel Trail (1921)
- The King's Arrow (1922)
- The Trail of the Golden Horn (1923)
- The Master Revenge (1924)
- Songs of a Bluenose (1925)
- The Fighting-Slogan (1926)
- Fighting Stars (1927)
- The Stumbling Shepherd (1929)
- The River Fury (1930)
- The Red Ranger (1931)
- The Girl at Bullet Lake (1933)
- The Crimson Sign (1935)
- Storm King Banner (1937)

But he was prolific far beyond this point. His verse, plays, short stories, prose pieces, sermons and serializations of his novels were published in many newspapers, and church magazines at the time. And as it is with most writers, he left a number of unpublished manuscripts.



The young "Hilie" Cody began to show signs of his literary career at an early age. When he and his two sisters, Julia and Mary, were small children, they started a little handwritten "family" paper called "The Jolly Band." Cody supplied the local news and the poetry under the name of Mr. DeWinkle, a nom de plume given to

him by his sisters because of his excessive winking habit. A few lines of his first poem still survive:

Our dear old duck of age and pride
Sat down in the dooryard one day and died.
Mr. DeWinkle took him hence
And threw him over the garden fence.

(Mrs. Julia Leonard, Interview, 1971)

By the time he was 12 he was keeping a small notebook journal in which he was carefully recording the important events of his daily life, such as visitations to his line traps, accounts of his finances, dialogue, rhymes, adventures:

"Adventures on the Border of Poverty Flat"

One night I went out to the Irish Settlement after Julia. It was quite a long way and to make the matter worse the ground was bare so we had to plod along on wheels. We got along all right until we came to a crossroad and instead of going the right road, I took the other so as to make it shorter as I thought. On and on we went not finding any other road until we met a friend. He quietly told us we were on the wrong road. So of course we had to turn back and go all over that same road again till we came to the right one. Then we sent on our way rejoicing and reached home about 10 o'clock p.m.

(H. A. Cody, Journal, 1885)

Of the three children born to miller, and lumberman George Redmond Cody and his wife, Loretta Augusta (Doney), Julia is the only one now living, at the age of 102. She clearly remembers how her father wanted his only son to go on to higher education after attending the village school. The son, however, had other plans:

". . . it was the summer of 1889 when I was seventeen that I decided to go to Sussex, twenty miles away, with a young neighbour to drill. The militia trained there every summer and I was keen to join the Princess Louise Regiment. I had my long-legged boots made, and my horse in readiness to go, when word came that the drill was put off until Fall. This, so far as I know, had never happened before. I have often wondered what it would have meant to my life if I had gone to Sussex that summer, for it was then that I made up my mind to study for the Ministry. My father and Uncle (Hiram, his father's brother and Cody's namesake) were anxious for me to do so, but, as I have mentioned, I wished to be a hunter or a trapper or a machinist. . . That fall I left home and went to Saint John and entered the Grammar School."

(H. A. Cody, Unfinished Autobiography, 1943)

From the old Grammar School in Saint John he went on to King's College, Windsor, Nova Scotia, where he was a student under Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, professor and author, who encouraged Cody's literary ambitions and influenced his early work. Many of his classmates who were to become well-known in their field were

among his close acquaintances:

“Dr. Robert W. Norwood was a classmate of mine, and during our last months at King's we roomed together downtown. He was a delightful companion, endowed above the ordinary with the gifts of oratory, music and verse. He went far in after years, and attained high fame as an author, lecturer, and Rector of a prominent church (St. Bartholomew's) in New York City.”

(H. A. Cody, *Unfinished Autobiography*, 1943)

Cody successfully completed his BA examinations in June, 1896 and returned to King's a year later, as was the custom, to receive his degree and to be valedictorian of the 1897 class. In 1908 he received an MA from King's, his first book being accepted as his thesis. His last visit to his old alma mater was in 1939, when an honorary degree of Divinity was conferred upon him.



At Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton, on December 20, 1896, he was ordained deacon. A few weeks later he took up his rectorship:

“The Bishop told me that I was to go to the Parish of Greenwich, so I arrived there on Monday, January 4th, 1897. It had been a cold morning when I left home with Tom Worden, a river boatman. I drove my horse, Tom Thum, hitched to a sleigh which my father had made, towing a two-wheel cart. Tom Worden had his own horse and pung, bringing my trunk and box of books. We landed that evening at Oak Point. The weather had changed and it was raining. Tom went back to Wickham, which was fortunate, for a great thaw had set in which broke up the ice in the river. Leaving my sleigh in Jas. N. Inch's barn, I hitched Tom Thum to my cart and drove down the road to the Rev. D. W. Pickett's, where I was expected. Cold, tired, hungry and forlorn, I received a most hearty welcome, and that house was a home to me for seven and a half years.

(H. A. Cody, *Unfinished Autobiography*, 1943)

From the little rectory at Oak Point on the lower St. John River, Cody launched a parish magazine called “The Church Bell”, started a circulation library, taking a number of book with him wherever he went extended his field of work into the parishes of Hampstead, Wickham, and Kars, and organized the building of the Church of St. Stephen at Queenstown and the Church of St. Albans at Speight Settlement. At the end of each day he went to his journal, a special column now being added to record the number of miles he traveled, on the average between 20 and 30 miles daily. His experiences on rough roads through all kinds of weather later formed the basis for his article, “Thrills of a Country Parson.”



In May, 1904 Cody went to the Yukon, responding to an appeal for a travelling missionary under William Bompas, the famous pioneer Bishop of the North. He made his headquarters with the Rev. Isaac Stringer at Whitehorse but spent most of his time visiting miners and Indians in the outlying stations, using pack-horse and canoe in summer and dog-sled and snowshoe in winter. His faithful Indian guide and interpreter, Jimmy Jackson, always went with him:

“Left camp at 9 a.m. after taking a picture of the same. Traveled across Wolf Creek (named because in olden days wolves ate up salmon which came up there), down the head waters of the Kluchshoe River which is very narrow – shallow and crooked here. By this stream we had luncheon and I shot a ptarmigan. Then we started up over a tremendous mountain through the Kut-koo-ke-a Pass and after reaching a great height went down the other side over a terrible trail and reach Dalton Post at 3 p.m. Here we were kindly received in Old Chief's house. . .

Here service was held – a young Indian with a large bell went around the village ringing the people together. And they all came and crowded into the chief's house. We had singing, prayers and I spoke about the life of Christ. . .”

(H. A. Cody, *Journal*, Mar. 27, 1905)



His experiences inspired him to write poems and articles which he submitted to various magazines, often accompanying them with a number of photographs that he had taken and developed himself. Then he would wait at the wharf for the steamer and the published results from “the outside,” along with mail from “home.” A vast correspondence was carried on with his relatives and friends in the East, who, like himself, were waiting for his summer visit. Upon his return to the Yukon in the Fall, the following news item appeared:

“Rev. H. A. Cody who left then weeks ago on a visit to his old home in New Brunswick, but primarily to forsake the ranks of single life, will arrive with his bride on this evening's train.”

(*The Whitehorse Star*, Oct. 3, 1905)

He married Jessie Margaret Flewelling of Oak Point, a member of his Greenwich parish congregation. They were to live in the Episcopal log rectory at Whitehorse, Cody having been appointed rector of the little log Christ Church next door.

(Tomorrow: Cody begins to write books)